

A PROFESSIONAL ARMY IN UKRAINE: THE VIEWS AND ASSESSMENTS OF THE POPULATION



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Gradual transition to the contractual system of manning is an important element of the Armed Forces reform. This problem is not overshadowed by other acute social and economic problems, for it touches the interests of many Ukrainian families. What is the attitude of the population to professionalism of the Ukrainian army? What is the idea of Ukrainian citizens of their future professional armed forces?

To find out the attitude of Ukrainians to that problem, Razumkov Centre Sociological Service on April 18-24, 2002, conducted a sociological survey that involved 2,000 respondents aged 18 and above¹.

We should rely on a professional defence

The necessity and reasons of the transition of Ukraine's Armed Forces from universal military duty to a contractual manning system are conditioned by a number of external and internal factors². This process is rather long — the State Programme of Transition of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Manning with Contracted Servicemen through 2015 envisages retention of the mixed system of the Armed Forces manning for the next 12 years. Evidently, actions of the authorities in this direction should be welcomed by rank-and-file Ukrainian citizens and supported by the country's population that provides personnel for the army. Well, does such support exist in today's Ukrainian society?

The absolute majority (69%) of those polled supports professionalisation of the Ukrainian army. This is somewhat lower than in neighbouring Russia where, according to the poll conducted by the All-Russian Centre for Public Opinion Survey, the idea of complete

professionalisation of the regular army obtained the support of 83% of citizens³, but nevertheless, its support in Ukraine is also significant. Such a position is understandable.

First of all, people want their calm and security to be provided not by yesterday's schoolchildren who sometimes stay in the Armed Forces against their will but by people who consciously made their choice, qualified specialists armed with advanced military equipment.

Second, by the results of the polls conducted in 2000-2002⁴, the population has clearly given a negative assessment of the changes in the Armed Forces observed in the years of independence. The majority (approximately two-thirds) of respondents does not believe that the Armed Forces of Ukraine are able to defend the national sovereignty from military threats. Hence, the negative situation must be reversed, i.e., transition to the Armed Forces of a new type — a professional army — is needed.

¹ Poll conducted with the financial support of Freedom House and USAID. Unless specified otherwise, cited hereinafter are the results of this survey.

² These factors are analysed in detail in Razumkov Centre analytical report published in this magazine.

³ <http://www.iet.ru/voen/pravdoc.html>.

⁴ Results of the previous polls are compared in the article: Bychenko A. Citizens of Ukraine about their Army. — *National Security & Defence*, 2002, No.1, pp.35-41, <http://www.uceps.com.ua>.

Third, one should take into account that transition to a professional army in fact means creation of new jobs, which is very important, especially for the youth, given the high rate of unemployment in Ukraine (11% of the work force⁵).

However, for a third (31%) of the population, the advantages of a professional army are not evident, and every seventh respondent (14.5%) stands against transition to a fully professional army. Evidently, this is a result of the following factors: (a) stereotypes of the Soviet times (“honourable duty of every citizen”, “the mandatory school of courage for every young person”) — as we will see below, respondents of the pension age are especially prejudiced against the professional army; (b) uncertainty in the ability of the state to provide funds for complete professionalisation of the national army; (c) the attitude to a professional serviceman as to a mercenary ready to fight for money, prevalent among a portion of the public.

As for the unanimity or difference in views of various groups of the population on these issues, it may be pointed out that **the attitudes of the population to full professionalism of the army show slight regional differences noticeable only along the East-West axis**⁶.

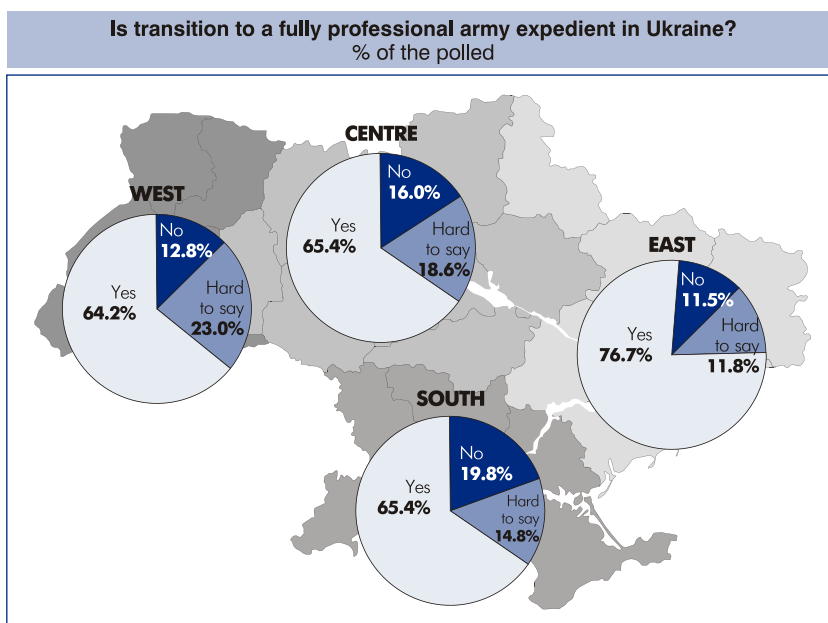
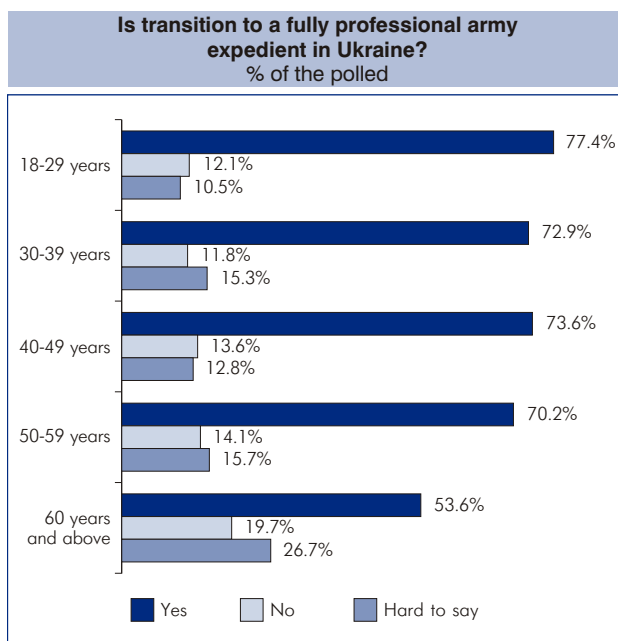
As we may see from Map “Is transition to a fully professional army expedient in Ukraine?” the share of adherents of the professional army is the greatest in the East (76.7%), the smallest — in the West (64.2%). In the East of Ukraine, the share of opponents of the professional army is the lowest (11.5%). In the West they make up 12.8%. In the South and in the Centre opinions divided almost identically: in both regions transition to a professional army is supported by equal shares of the polled (65.4%), opposed by 19.8% and 16% of respondents, respectively.

Hence, the assessments of respondents from different regions, despite their particularity, do not differ in principle: the overwhelming majority of the population in all regions unconditionally supports professionalisation of the Ukrainian army.

Insignificant differences are also observed in the positions of different demographic groups. Specifically, men are more positive about transition to a professional army (74.5% — “for” it and 15.2% — “against”) than women (64.5% and 13.7%, respectively). In turn, villagers are more conservative about full professionalism of the Ukrainian army. It is supported by 63.4% of village respondents, opposed — by 15.9%. Town folks are more positive about the professional army, but the difference is not striking: 71.6% — “for” it and 13.8% — “against”.

The differences between various age groups of Ukraine’s population are more evident. As it is clear from Diagram “Is transition to a fully professional army expedient in Ukraine?” the most enthusiastic attitude to professionalism of the army (77.4% — “for”) is observed in the youngest age group (18-29 years) — conscripts or recent soldiers.

As we may see, among representatives of other age groups, too, the adherents of a professional army are in a clear majority, with few opponents and abstainers.



⁵ According to the methods of the International Labour Organisation.

⁶ Hereinafter the following regional division is used. **The South:** the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Odesa, Kherson, Mykolayiv regions; **the Centre:** the city of Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv regions; **the West:** Volyn, Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi regions; **the East:** Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhya, Luhansk, Kharkiv regions.

Only in the group of 60 years and above, i.e., respondents of the pension age, the ratio changes substantially. The aggregate share of those who were against or undecided (46.4%) is comparable with the percentage of adherents of transition to a professional army (53.6%).

Hence, despite insignificant regional and demographic differences, the overwhelming majority of Ukraine's population supports the course of professionalisation of Ukraine's Armed Forces. The only group of respondents whose support for transition to a professional army is much weaker than the sample-average is made up of people of pension age (60 years and above).

It should be noted that the population sees it expedient to have the national army reformed, not just to improve maintenance of the Armed Forces and military servants. This is proved by the answers to the following question put to adherents of transition to a professional army: "Would you support transition to a professional army, if in the present Armed Forces conscripts were well maintained and technically equipped and had comfortable conditions of service?" (See relevant Diagram).

Indeed, only 5.7% of adherents of a professional army believe that creation of proper conditions for conscripts would remove the issue of complete transition of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to professionalism from the agenda.

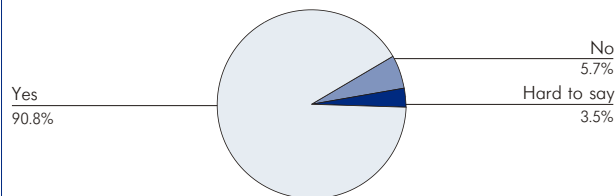
At the same time, such results of the poll may be attributed to somewhat sceptical spirit of respondents — under the present level of the Armed Forces funding (assessed by the population as unsatisfactory), proper material and technical maintenance of conscripts will not be attained soon.

Therefore, in Ukrainian society there is great potential support for transition to professional Armed Forces, for creation of a new type of army meeting present-day requirements and safely defending the national sovereignty.

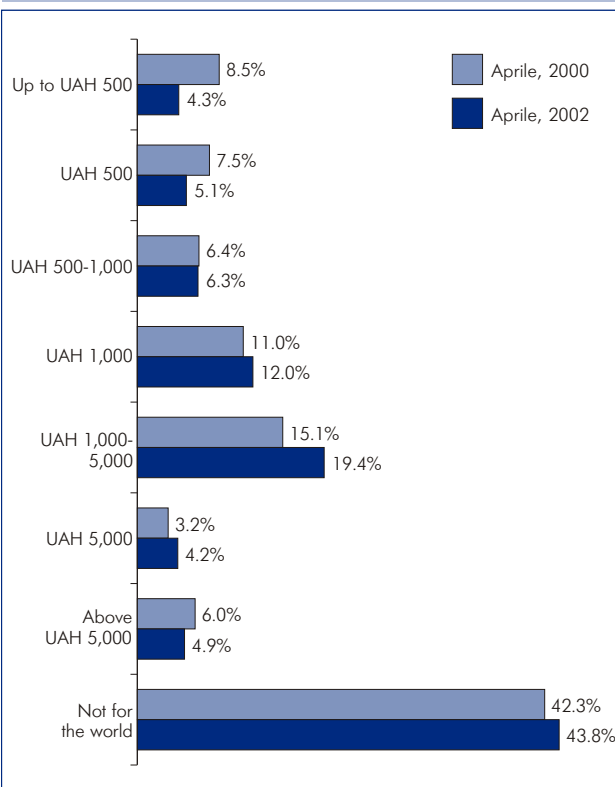
Moreover, there are many people in Ukraine willing to serve in a professional Ukrainian army. Less than half (43.8%) of citizens would not serve under a contract at any price and would not advise their relatives or children to do so (Diagram "For what monthly pay would you engage (recommend your children or relatives to engage) for contractual military service as a private or sergeant?"). On the other hand, some respondents agree to serve for even less than UAH 1,000 (15.7%). A third of the polled (31.4%) answered that they would agree to contractual service for a pay from 1,000 to 5,000 UAH, 9.1% — for UAH 5,000 and more. It should be noted that over the two recent years the situation in this respect has remained generally stable⁷. To be sure, when estimating the would-be pay of a professional serviceman, one should take into account that the desire of a citizen to serve under a contract is not enough. After all, a potential candidate must meet certain, rather tough demands; lacking this, high combat effectiveness cannot be attained.

So, when fixing allowances of contracted servicemen, one should evidently proceed from the proposal of the

Would you support transition to a professional army, if in the present Armed Forces conscripts were well maintained and technically equipped and had comfortable conditions of service?
% of adherents of transition to a professional army



For what monthly pay would you engage (recommend your children or relatives to engage) for contractual military service as a private or soldier?
% of the polled



largest group — UAH 1,000 to 5,000 (to be sure, this amount should grow proportionally with the increase in average Ukrainian salaries).

The professional soldier: a mercenary or a patriot?

At present, this seemingly rhetoric issue is in the centre of a discussion in the national media and within the state and political establishment⁸. In particular, opponents of complete transition to a professional army stress that conscript service maintains national conscience of personnel, promotes patriotic upbringing of the population, provides connection between the Armed Forces and the populace. All this however does not

⁷ It is not the first time that Razumkov Centre Sociological Service turns to this issue. Since 2000, the structure of answers has not changes substantially.

⁸ For more details see the article by V.Tiutiunyk "On the Path towards Professional Armed Forces" published in this magazine.

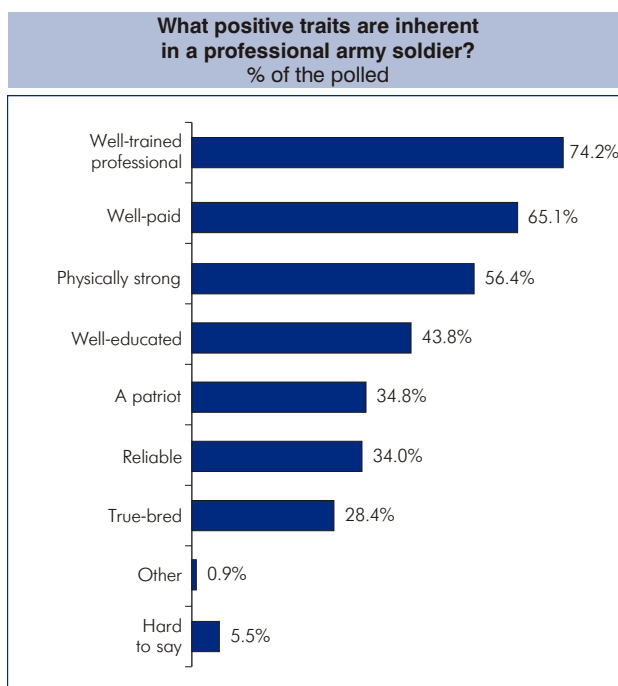
prevent Ukrainian citizens from positive treatment of professional servicemen (Diagram “*With what image do you associate a professional soldier, in the first place?*”). In this respect, positive spirits clearly dominate the public consciousness.

It strikes the eye that the greatest share of respondents (33%) associates a professional soldier primarily with the image of a “staunch defender of the native land, true patriot”. The second place (21.5%) was given to professional qualities — the ability to perform the most complex tasks and find a way out of any situation. Far less respondents associate a professional soldier with an ordinary citizen who performs routine work (16%) and with the present-day servicemen, but better maintained (12.5%). Finally, every ninth respondent (11.8%) is sure that a professional soldier is a mercenary fighting for money.

Hence, in the minds of rank-and-file citizens, the image of a professional soldier is primarily associated with a true patriot and true warrior. The negative attitude as to a mercenary is not widely spread.

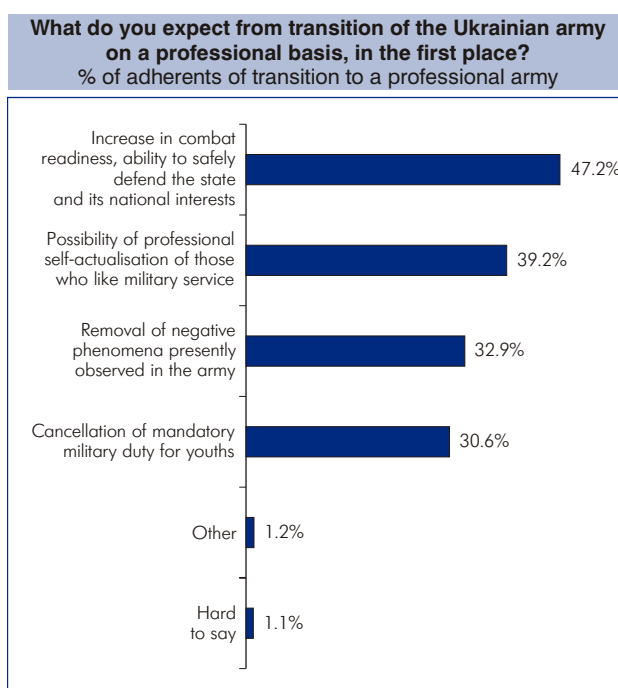
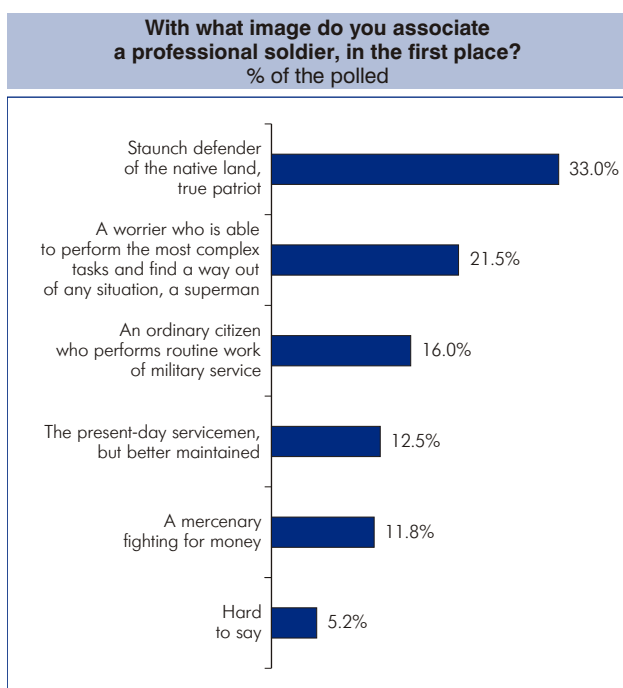
Regarding the positive traits considered inherent in servicemen, respondents give priority to the high level of special training (74.2%) (Diagram “*What positive traits are inherent in a professional army soldier?*”⁹). It is followed by material wellbeing (65.1%), physical strength (56.4%), education (43.8%), patriotism (34.8%), etc.

It is noteworthy that, according to respondents, “good” heritage is far less inherent in professional soldiers than, say, special training or physical strength. By and large, public consciousness cherishes a positive image of the person serving in the national Armed Forces on a contractual basis.



To understand why Ukrainians need a professional army one should analyse answers to the question: “What do you expect from transition of the Ukrainian army to a professional basis, in the first place?”¹⁰ (See relevant Diagram).

The greater share of adherents of transition to a professional army (47.2%) hopes that professionalism of the Armed Forces will lead to the increase in their combat



⁹ Respondents were supposed to give all possible answers.

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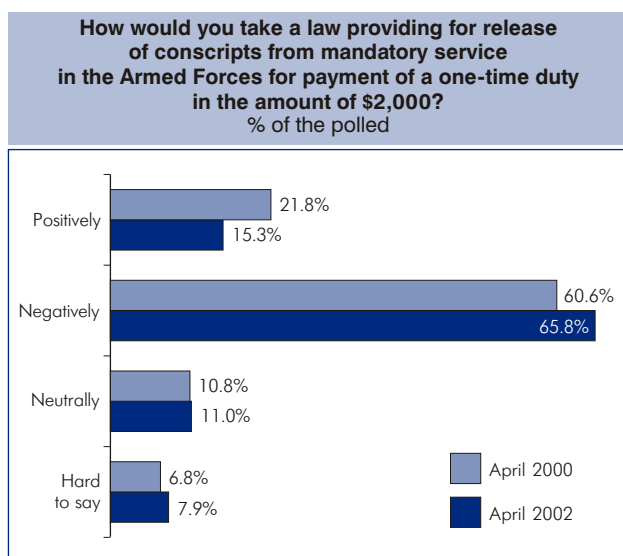
readiness, ability to safely defend the state and its national interests, which, in fact, is the main task of any army.

At the same time, a significant share (39.2%) of respondents points to such important aspect as the possibility of professional self-actualisation of those who like military service, and 32.9% of the polled are sure that transition to a professional army will assist in removal of negative phenomena presently observed in the Armed Forces, such as non-statutory relations on the part of the “elders”. Somewhat fewer (30.6%) polled view cancellation of mandatory military duty as a positive development for young people.

Paying to stay out of the army?

Some countries with mandatory military duty see it possible to solve one of the problems associated with it for the benefit of the state budget. There, conscripts who for one or another reason do not want to serve in the army may be released from that duty for a certain, quite sizeable, sum of money. Is such practice acceptable for Ukraine?

The relevant question was among those put by Razumkov Centre Sociological Service (Diagram “How would you take a law providing for release of conscripts from mandatory service in the Armed Forces for payment of a one-time duty in the amount of \$2,000?”). It appeared that our compatriots were not enthusiastic about it: only 15.3% of the polled assessed it positively, while two-thirds of citizens (65.8%) was negative, and every ninth respondent (11%) remained neutral.



A substantial difference in views dependent on the age of respondents was not unexpected: young people were much more positive about the proposed novelty. A positive response was given by almost a quarter (23.4%) of the polled aged between 18 and 29 years (negative — by 59.1%). Meanwhile, among the



respondents of 30-39 years, a positive answer was given by far fewer people — 17.5% (negative — by 60.3%), of 40-49 years — 14.2% against 70.6%, of 50-59 years — 14.6% against 70.5%. Especially ill-disposed were respondents aged 60 and above: only 6.7% of them approved of the proposed idea, while 70.5% rejected it.

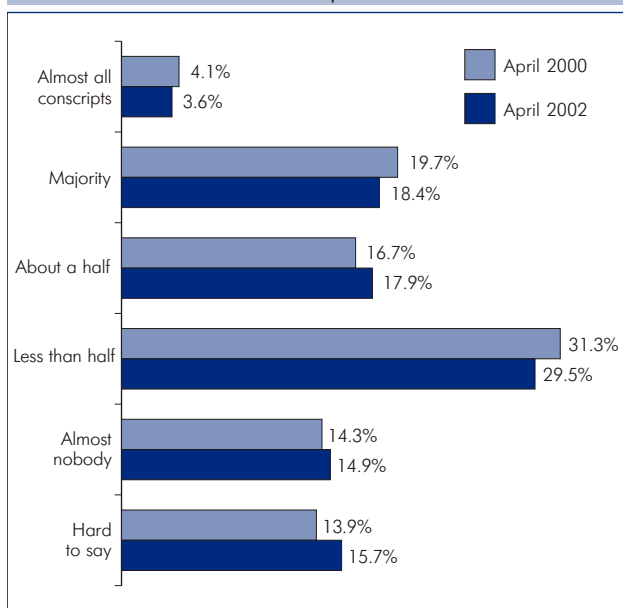
It is worth noticing that the idea enjoys greater support among men (18.5% of positive responses, 65.8% — of negative) than among women (12.6% — positive, 65.9% — negative).

The attitude to legalisation of paid evasion of the military duty largely depends on the incomes of citizens. It is no wonder that better-to-do citizens are more enthusiastic about such proposal. The positive attitude in this respect was demonstrated by a quarter of respondents (25.3%) with above-average and high incomes, half of citizens of that category (49.4%) gave a negative answer. Respondents with average incomes are disposed more negatively: 19.5% of answers were positive, 63.8% — negative. People with low and below-average incomes were the least receptive of this idea: positive attitude was demonstrated by 12.6%, negative — by 68.2%. Maybe the main reason for such difference lies in the sense of social injustice caused by this proposal, since for a rich man it is much easier to pay such a duty. To some extent, this is proved by the difference (dependent on income) in answers to another question: “Would there be many those willing to avoid mandatory service in the army having paid a one-time duty in the amount of \$2,000?” 9% of the polled with above-average income believes that almost all conscripts would exercise this right, while among respondents with average and below-average incomes, there were almost three times fewer optimists — 3.5% and 3.3%, respectively. Quite a few citizens suggest that almost nobody would exercise this right (14.9%), or this right would be exercised by less than half of conscripts (29.5%). 17.9% of the polled tends to believe that this right would be exercised by approximately half of conscripts, 18.4% — by a majority. And only 3.6% of respondents are sure that almost all

conscripts would be willing to avoid military duty in that way (Diagram “If a law is passed releasing conscripts from mandatory military service...”).

It should also be noted that over the past two years, the attitude of Ukrainians to the proposed imposition of the \$2,000 duty in exchange for the release from conscript service became worse. For instance, in the spring of 2000¹¹ the possibility of legalisation of paid evasion from army service was welcomed by more respondents (21.8%) than in 2002 (15.3%), not welcomed — by fewer (60.6% against 65.8%).

If a law is passed releasing conscripts from mandatory military service in the Armed Forces for payment of a one-time duty in the amount of \$2,000, would there be many those willing to avoid mandatory service?
% of the polled



Therefore, it may be stated that the idea of “defence of the native land at will” (a professional army) is far more welcomed by Ukrainians than the idea of “selective conditions for the rich”.

Summing up, it may be restated that Ukrainian society needs a professional army, and people expect from professionalisation of the army, in the first place, an increase in combat readiness, possibility of effective protection of the state and its national interests. This idea is supported by all groups of the population in all regions. The only group of the population whose support for a professional army is clearly lower than of other citizens is represented by people of the pension age (60 years and above), but even among them, adherents of the army transition to the professional basis significantly overweight opponents. Public consciousness cherishes a positive image of a professional soldier — staunch defender of the native land, a patriot and true professional.

It may be stated for sure that society is ready for the relevant reform of the Armed Forces, and steps in that direction made by the state will be supported by the population. ■

¹¹ The survey was conducted by Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between March 25 - April 5, 2000. 2,012 respondents aged 18 and above were polled in all Ukraine's regions.